

## STATEMENT FROM OUR STUDENT LEADERSHIP

Dear GSBS Community,

It has been another incredible year for Outreach, and I am so proud of all we have accomplished! As we get further into this Summer 2025 semester, with it comes the closing of my second and final term as president of GSBS Community Outreach. It has been a singular joy and a true honor to take on this role for the past two years, riding the tails of other GSBS students who have cared, as I do, about our place in our communities as scientists.

Naturally, as scientists, we see the great value of our own research (and rightly so!). However, consideration of its larger implications should not and cannot end at the winning over of our funders nor the dissemination of our science be limited to only our peers. I hope that we, especially as early career scientists, continue to advocate for the work we have dedicated ourselves to, but also for the people it impacts. I hope that we recognize that our impact is not confined, for example, to the therapies and treatments that eventually make it to the clinic. Rather, it also lies in the sharing of knowledge and scientific understanding with the public and in an investment in the next generations of scientists who will one day take up the mantle. This is the very heart of Outreach.

“Community” is a term that does not simply sit empty in our organization’s name, and during my time in Outreach, is a concept I have tried to emphasize and center. Coming to Houston with no community of my own, I have been so lucky to find one at GSBS, and Outreach has been integral to that – in fostering community amongst our own students, as well as with our neighbors in the Texas Medical Center and across the greater Houston area.

Once again (and again and again), I must thank each person who has made all we have been able to do together possible: my fellow students and student leaders, who have shown amazing enthusiasm for and commitment to the work we do; each non-GSBS group of students and staff, who has eagerly accepted the invitation to participate in our events; our faculty advisor, Dr. Keri Schadler, our rock, Cheryl Spitzenberger, and all past and present UTHealth Houston/MD Anderson faculty and administration, who have shown us nothing but endless support and led us by example through their commitment and care; and our community partners, who have graciously allowed us the time and space to bring science to our local communities. It has been so fulfilling to work alongside all of you and to see Outreach change and grow over the past few years. I look forward to seeing how we will continue to carry on this legacy of service.

I have long held the belief that, in a world where our connections to each other are easily fractured and our most vulnerable increasingly left behind, we do, in fact, owe a lot to each other – perhaps the most fundamental yet greatest of which are compassion, care, and support. Over the next few months, I will happily and confidently place the helms of GSBS Community Outreach into the capable hands of our next leadership team. It is my sincere hope that we all continue to share in this noble and beautiful human obligation in all the ways we are able and called to – as GSBS students, as scientists, and as folks in community with each other.

Until next time,

Gema Sunga – GSBS Community Outreach President, 2023-2025



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This newsletter is published by the GSBS Community Outreach student organization at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center UTHealth Houston Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences in Houston, Texas.

Co-Editors: Kate Cho, Gemalene Sunga, Amanda Warner, Mirrah Bashir, Munazza Khan

# A YEAR IN REVIEW

2024-2025

**OCT 2024**

*Houston ArBOOretum  
Halloween Event*

**DEC 2024**

*Student Organization  
Holiday Social*

**FEB 2025**

*Smith Elementary  
STEM Night*

**APR 2025**

*Houston Health  
Museum DNA Day*

**NOV 2024**

*Community Outreach  
Back-to-School Meeting*

**JAN 2025**

*Community Outreach  
Science Night*

**MAR 2025**

*Rhodes School College  
Convention*

*Berean Christian  
Academy Science Fair*

Every October, the Houston Arboretum hosts their ArBOOretum Halloween event. Here, there are many family-friendly, fall-themed activities. For our third year in a row, GSBS Outreach volunteers guided families along the Trick-or-Treat Nature Trail and led the pumpkin painting session for kids. After our shifts, we explored the many activities available, such as a showcase of different species of birds. This event is always a great way to welcome each new academic year, giving us an opportunity to welcome our new volunteers and foster our community outside of the lab.





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GSBS Community Outreach volunteers, old and new, came together to kick off the new academic year at our first official meeting of the year. It was great to see old friends and to make new ones. We were thrilled to see so many new faces in the room! We shared about our collective interest in serving our communities and discussed plans for various events for the year ahead. It is wonderful to be surrounded by such a supportive and caring community!



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This year, all the GSBS student organizations came together for a festive holiday social. Each student group hosted a winter-themed activity. Outreach hosted a craft station where students were able to make greeting cards for our pediatric friends at MD Anderson Cancer Center.

Every card was unique and showcased the creativity of our GSBS students. This was such a fun way to share in holiday cheer in a rare gathering of all GSBS groups and students.





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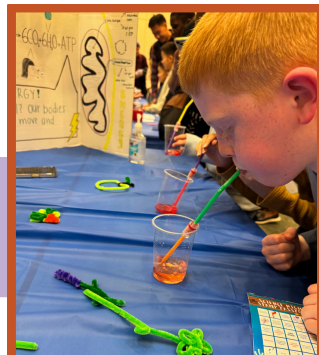


We had another fantastic year at Science Night!

This year, we were joined by more than 500 families, made possible by our incredible volunteers across different GSBS programs and student organizations and other UTHealth Houston and MD Anderson Cancer Center groups. Our young guests dove into hands-on activities in genetics, microbiology, and physics, making for an unforgettable day of discovery and excitement.

The energy in the room was contagious as children performed tumor “surgeries,” explored the cardiovascular system using balloon-and-straw models, and built colorful cell structures out of construction paper to take home as souvenirs. The ever-popular slime station also made its return — and was a hit once again!

By sharing fun and fascinating science, we hope to spark curiosity and inspire the next generation of scientists.



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This year, we were invited to participate in the STEAM Night hosted by Douglas Smith Elementary in Alief, TX. We were thrilled to host a sea of energetic young students and their families at our tables, making slime and chromatography flowers.

We are always happy to partner directly with local schools and hope to further build such relationships. As graduate students, it can also be such a grounding experience to be back on an elementary school campus!





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For the first time, GSBS Community Outreach was invited to participate in the Rhodes School College Convention. This was a rewarding experience that challenged our graduate students to simplify scientific concepts, like explaining a "microscope" to young elementary- and middle school-aged students. This event allowed us to flex our communication skills with younger audiences, while hoping to inspire students to explore diverse career possibilities in science and beyond. It is always a privilege to work with kids and contribute to their understanding and motivation for future career choices.



This year, we were again invited to judge the science fair at the Berean Christian Academy. We had a great time judging poster presentations by their seventh graders! The students explored topics ranging from plant biology to human physiology, and we were so impressed by their creativity and curiosity. Many used everyday items to carry out experiments at home and followed the scientific process from start to finish.

It was not only inspiring to see their excitement for science, but also a great opportunity for us to practice giving constructive feedback as judges. Huge thanks to the school for having us, we're already looking forward to seeing next year's projects!

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GSBS Outreach joined forces with the Health Museum in Houston to help with their DNA Day. More than 100 students, from grades in elementary to high school, attended the event. Outreach hosted the DNA bracelet activity, where students had the opportunity to use beads to 'spell out' a sequence of their favorite organism of choice. We also helped with the DNA origami activity. For the brave ones who chose this activity, patience was rewarded with a very cool paper double helix model of DNA.

We appreciate the opportunity to continue to partner with the Health Museum and all their awesome support of STEM for youth around Houston.





# VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

## STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



## MIRRAH BASHIR

**Mirrah is a second-year PhD student in Molecular & Translational Biology Program doing prostate cancer research, and is a first-time Outreach Coordinator.**

### **Why did you join Outreach?**

Not only have I always loved science, but I have also found so much joy in sharing that passion with others. Getting involved in Outreach felt like a natural extension of that. It's one of the most rewarding ways to connect with the broader community and help make science more accessible, engaging, and less intimidating. I'm especially drawn to the idea of bridging the gap between research and the public, particularly for communities that may not always have access to strong science education or exposure to STEM fields.

### **What events did you participate in this year?**

This year, I helped organize and volunteer at Science Night, where I set up our booth and engaged with attendees. I also served as a judge for science fair presentations at Berean Christian Academy, and I participated in the Rhodes School Convention career fair. Each of these events was a unique opportunity to connect with students and talk to them about science and what I do as a researcher. But more than that, it was inspiring to hear them talk about science. Their curiosity and excitement were so energizing. It's amazing to see that spark and recognize the potential in the next generation of scientists.

### **What takeaways do you have after a year with Outreach?**

Being involved in Outreach has been incredibly fulfilling. It reminds me that my impact as a scientist isn't limited to the lab but that it extends into the community. I love the idea that I can help demystify science and inspire the next wave of young scientists. It's also been a great exercise in science communication. We're so used to speaking in technical terms with other scientists, but explaining our work to kids or non-scientists pushes us to think differently and connect in more meaningful, clear ways. It's a skill I value deeply and one that makes me a better scientist overall!

# VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

## STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



## AMANDA WARNER

Amanda is a fifth-year PhD student in Cancer Biology. She has served as an Outreach Officer for two years, currently as Vice President and previously as Secretary.

### Why did you join Outreach?

I joined Outreach for a variety of reasons. First, I was taught the value of giving back from a young age and looked for opportunities to serve the community during my first year at graduate school. I also enjoy mentoring and teaching, both of which are part of Outreach activities. Lastly, I joined because I wanted to make new friends at the GSBS! Outreach provided an avenue for me to pursue all of these goals.

### What events did you participate in this year?

I participated in the Back to School event, Student Organization Holiday Social, Science Night, Smith Elementary School Science Night, and the Health Museum DNA Day.

### What takeaways do you have after your four years with Outreach?

Since 2021 where we were starting to have events again after COVID19, I have seen Outreach continue to grow each year – both in the number of events and the number of attendees which shows how eager our community is for STEM outreach. With all these wonderful events, it truly does take a village – of volunteers – and it has been amazing seeing our volunteers shine when taking leadership of specific parts of Outreach.

### What would you say to students interested in becoming involved with Outreach?

If you are interested in STEM outreach to the local community and helping to further expand the reach of Outreach and to inspire the next generation of scientists, we as a leadership team welcome you to contact us and volunteer – we would love to have you be a part of the team!

*If you would like to see a special volunteer featured in our Volunteer Spotlight for the good work they do, please [email us](#)!*



# LOOKING AHEAD

2025-2026 OUTREACH LEADERSHIP TEAM

*Congratulations to our newly  
elected officers for the upcoming  
2025-2026 academic year!*



**AMANDA WARNER**

PRESIDENT



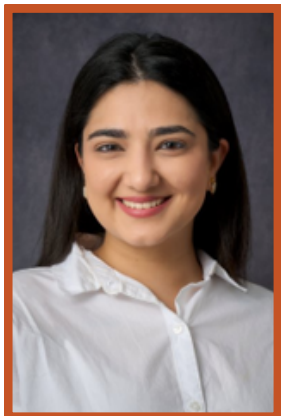
**MUNAZZA KHAN**

VICE PRESIDENT



**ERICKA HUMPHREY**

SECRETARY



**MIRRAH BASHIR**

MEDIA RELATIONS COORDINATOR

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## DEBAKEY CELL LAB INTERNSHIP



**The Health Museum**  
JOHN P. MCGOVERN MUSEUM OF HEALTH & MEDICAL SCIENCE

## DEBAKEY CELL LAB INTERNSHIP

For a second year, GSBS Community Outreach will be one of several local groups to collaborate with The Health Museum, located nearby in Houston's Museum District. We will be participating in their DeBakey Cell Lab Internship. Catch us there on **Saturday, June 21, 2025!**

This is a six-week summer program for high school students to delve into the world of biomedical science, to gain hands-on exposure to different areas of science and research, to build skills in science communication, and to receive guidance in professional development.

With GSBS Community Outreach, GSBS students will lead one week's session at The Health Museum, where we will host a panel of graduate students to demonstrate the diversity in research areas and discuss the graduate school experience. We will also lead various lessons and activities to exhibit the breadth of our work in biomedical science.

Please visit The Health Museum website to learn more about their mission or other internship opportunities they offer, or to see how else you can get involved.





# UPCOMING EVENTS

SUMMER BIOMEDICAL ACADEMY

GSBS COMMUNITY  
OUTREACH PRESENTS



## SUMMER BIOMEDICAL ACADEMY

**JULY 24-25**  
**9 A.M. - 5 P.M.**

***SBA is a program for high school juniors and seniors interested in careers in science, medicine, and research.***

- **For high school students**, applications to attend SBA are now open!
- **For GSBS students and UTHealth or MD Anderson biomedical professionals**, SBA only comes together with the help of our generous volunteers. If you are interested in getting involved, volunteer sign-ups are now open or email us for more details.

**HIGH SCHOOL  
STUDENTS  
APPLY HERE:**



**VOLUNTEERS  
SIGN UP HERE:**



**QUESTIONS? EMAIL US AT  
GSBS\_OUTREACHPROGRAM@UTH.TMC.EDU**

# GETTING INVOLVED

## MEMBERSHIP POSITIONS



*Thank you to all the  
volunteers and coordinators  
who served this year!*

*If you are interested in getting involved, please consider these positions:*

## COORDINATOR

Looking to take more of an active role within GSBS Community Outreach? Then a coordinator position is right for you! Coordinators take on more responsibility within Outreach to help the officer team plan and execute events.

### Requirements:

- Attend monthly planning meetings
- Vote on opportunities that Outreach participates in
- Assist in planning and setting up for Outreach events
- Volunteer for at least two GSBS Outreach events during the academic year

## VOLUNTEER

Looking for a position with more flexibility while still allowing for great opportunities to participate in science outreach events in the community? Then a volunteer position is right for you!

Volunteers have fewer responsibilities within Outreach and mainly assist with executing events. For example, we have many students from the GSBS programs and organizations that volunteer for various Outreach events throughout the year to make them successful.

### Requirements:

- Volunteer for at least one GSBS Outreach event during the academic year

*Please email us if you are interested in joining Outreach in either capacity.*

# GETTING INVOLVED

## LEADERSHIP POSITIONS: *FROM OUR CURRENT LEADERSHIP*

### PRESIDENT — GEMALENE SUNGA

#### What is your favorite part about Outreach?

Community-building is the very heart of Outreach in my eyes. So as a young scientist learning to navigate what it is to be both student and scientist in the biggest medical center in the world, my favorite part of Outreach has been learning to use my unique position to connect with fellow GSBS students and to support the communities around us.

#### Why did you decide to run for Outreach President?

Volunteering in my community has always been a crucial part of my process of making a place 'home', wherever I am. In coming to GSBS, I saw Outreach as this opportunity, as a way to bridge my interest in serving my community with my growing understanding of my role in it as a scientist. In running for President, I wanted to make a bigger contribution to what we do in Outreach, to help our organization grow and to grow our connections with our own community.

### VICE PRESIDENT — AMANDA WARNER

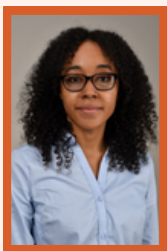
#### What led you to run for Outreach Vice President?

I ran for Vice President as I wanted to learn more about how to effectively plan and organize events. Additionally, I wanted to help serve the community and expand the reach of Outreach through fostering relationships with community partners and organizations.

#### What would you say to other students interested in joining Outreach?

I would say to definitely join as it is a wonderful opportunity to inspire the next generation of scientists, grow in leadership, and have fun with friends at the same time!

### SECRETARY — JOHANA GUTIEREZ



#### What is your favorite part about Outreach?

My favorite part about Outreach was seeing the excitement on children's and teenagers' faces when presented with various activities or experiments related to science.

#### Why did you decide to run for Outreach Secretary?

I have always wanted to be a part of an organization that promotes science as when I was young, these outreach groups did not exist or were not promoted well.

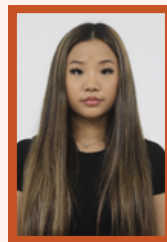
### MEDIA RELATIONS COORDINATOR — KATE CHO

#### What led you to run for Outreach Media Relations Coordinator?

I continued my role as Media Relations Coordinator this year because I really enjoyed sharing the moments from Outreach activities with greater GSBS and local community, and being involved in organizing events to serve the community. From interacting with Outreach coordinators and volunteers at our events, I was reminded of the strong community we have within Community Outreach and GSBS and how that allows us to serve better.

#### What would you say to other students interested in joining Outreach?

Outreach provides unique opportunities to use your scientific background to inspire the next generation of scientists. It also helps you strengthen the community through various ways. As busy as grad school can be, I encourage everyone to join or participate in our events! They are truly rewarding.





# AROUND THE COMMUNITY

## USEFUL RESOURCES & LINKS

*Future publications of our GSBS Community Outreach newsletter will be released BI-ANNUALLY.*

*Keep an eye out for future issues!*

## KEEP UP WITH US!

Visit our website [here](#).



[gsbs\\_outreachprogram@uth.tmc.edu](mailto:gsbs_outreachprogram@uth.tmc.edu)



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[GSBS\\_Outreach](#)

“SCIENCE KNOWS NO COUNTRY, BECAUSE KNOWLEDGE BELONGS TO HUMANITY, AND IS THE TORCH WHICH ILLUMINATES THE WORLD.”

- LOUIS PASTEUR

## ON THE RADAR

- **ComSciCon** (Science Communication Conferences in Houston) is a free science communication opportunity, typically held within the Texas Medical Center. Read their frequently asked questions and keep an eye out for updates for the 2026 conference.
- **HSPAG** (the Houston Science Policy and Advocacy Group) is a non-partisan, scientist-run advocacy group committed to science education and fostering interactions between scientists, lawmakers, and the public. Check them out for other ways to locally advocate for science and science education!

## LOCAL VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

[Volunteer Houston](#) and the City of Houston's [Volunteer Initiatives Program](#) are excellent resources to help you find all types of volunteer opportunities happening around the city that might resonate with you.

Some examples of local programs include:

- **Houston Food Bank** — packing, sorting, or delivering food
- **Sleep in Heavenly Peace** — building beds for children in need in Houston

*If you have suggestions or favorite places where you volunteer around Houston, please [let us know](#) so we can add them to the next Newsletter!*

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